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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001935

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: INCIDENT PREVENTION - LOTS OF MEETINGS,
FEW RESULTS

REF: TBILISI 1714

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN R. BASS FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) AND (d).

11. (C) Comment. The Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs) have become more routine and therefore there is less "breaking news" to report out of them. This has led to more regular contact and a general reduction of tension among the participants. However, the same themes are discussed at each IPRM with little progress. The Abkhaz side appears to be using the IPRM as a way to keep a window open with the Georgians while they await the closing of the boundary, while the South Ossetians continue to inject status issues into procedural negotiations, thereby delaying substantive discussions. The OSCE, which has proposed a three-person roving support team to support its participation in the IPRMs and the Geneva process, has tried to stay involved with its separate initiatives. While their efforts to resolve gas delivery to Akhagori are making progress, the missing and detained persons meeting was ineffective, largely because the OSCE does not have current on-the-ground knowledge and is therefore unable to bring much substance to the meeting. End comment.

ABKHAZ IPRMs - SCHOOLCHILDREN IN GALI

13. (C) The two most recent Abkhaz incident prevention and response mechanisms (IPRM) met in Gali on October 6 and 20. In both these meetings, the discussions focused on schoolchildren crossing the administrative boundary line (ABL), security incidents, and maritime incidents. During the October 20 meeting, Ruslan Kishmaria, lead for the Abkhaz de facto authorities, became very angry when discussing the education of Georgian schoolchildren. He accused the director of one village school in Nabakevi of being a provocateur for refusing to replace the bilingual Georgian and Russian sign on the school with a trilingual one (Abkhaz, Georgian and Russian). Kishmaria further stated that there was no need for Georgian children to leave Abkhazia for school, as there is ample opportunity for them to receive an education in Gali, but that the Abkhaz will tolerate the boundary crossing, "for now." Kishmaria predicted that the problem would be resolved when winter arrives and children are unable to cross the boundary regularly. In one positive development, Kishmaria did suggest a joint Georgian-Abkhaz visit to a local school which the Georgian side agreed to.

ABKHAZ IPRMs - SECURITY INCIDENTS

14. (C) Security incidents in Gali were raised during the meetings. On October 20, EUMM representatives asked the Abkhaz about a report on Rustavi-2 that Georgian teachers in Gali were being beaten. According to EUMM Ambassador Haber, the Abkhaz side convincingly refuted these allegations, and Haber noted that the EUMM will be more cautious about raising such news stories in the future. The Georgian side then

presented videos supposedly showing overflights of undisputed Georgian territory by Russian helicopters, but according to the EUMM, the videos were inconclusive. MOIA's Director of the Division for Analysis Shota Utiashvili, lead for the Georgian side, did not pursue the issue after Kishmaria's denial of the incidents, and according to Haber, Shota appeared to be merely going through the motions on that particular point.

15. (C) The maritime incidents were also raised, with the Abkhaz side demanding the organization of a fact-finding group. Utiashvili noted that Georgia and Turkey were engaged in bilateral negotiations to determine a process for Turkish ships wanting to go to Abkhazia. Abkhaz de facto "deputy foreign minister" Maxim Gunjia, contrary to his usual friendliness at the IPRMs, threatened that Georgian ships would be sunk if they ventured into Abkhaz "territorial waters."

SOUTH OSSETIA IPRMs

16. (C) The South Ossetian IPRMs met most recently on September 24 and October 22. As usual, these IPRMs were less constructive than the Abkhaz ones, with procedural issues continuing to dominate. The main substantive issues discussed on September 24 were missing and detained persons and Russian desertions, while the October 22 meeting focused on access to land, incidents involving cattle theft, delineation of the ABL and EUMM access to Perevi.

17. (C) During the October 22 meeting, Russian representatives refuted press reports that the ABL at Akhalgori would be

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closed on November 1. Delineation of the ABL was also discussed for the first time in this forum. The village of Kveshi, where an OSCE patrol was detained and arrested last year, continues to be a problem, and the South Ossetian de facto authorities offered a joint visit to the village to look at the boundary line. The Georgian side complained that some villagers were having difficulty accessing their farm land, and South Ossetian de facto representative Chigoev acknowledged that farmers should be allowed to work up to the ABL. During this meeting, Haber asked for regularized access to Perevi for both the EUMM and Georgian law enforcement authorities, but the South Ossetian side denied this request. EUMM received unescorted access to Perevi on October 15, 21 and 22, but was denied access on October 16 and 17.

18. (C) In both IPRMs, the chairmanship was discussed and the South Ossetian representatives expressed willingness to accept a Secretariat which would be responsible for agenda-setting and establishing a general meeting protocol. However, the South Ossetians are looking for ways to inject status into the mechanism, insisting, for example, that the discussion of agenda points should be chaired by the side proposing the specific point. According to EUMM, some type of proposal needs to be agreed upon and signed, because the IPRMs cannot keep continuing with so many procedural issues unresolved.

OSCE HOLDS MEETING ON MISSING AND DETAINED PERSONS

19. (C) On October 19, an OSCE Conflict Prevention Center staff member traveled to South Ossetia for a meeting with representatives from Georgia, South Ossetia and Russia to discuss the issue of missing and detained persons, beyond similar discussions with the IPRM. This idea had been raised in the Geneva talks on September 17, as a way to allow expert third parties (such as ICRC) to engage in the discussion of this particular issue. EUMM was not invited to the meeting, however, and noted their displeasure with this, saying that since OSCE has no presence on the ground, they had little to contribute. Tasked with making logistical arrangements, the OSCE staff member attending the meeting bought folding chairs

and a beach umbrella and set them up on the boundary line between Georgian and South Ossetian checkpoints in Dvani, where the meeting occurred. Perhaps signified by this feeble set-up, the meeting was deemed unsuccessful by all, including the OSCE.

¶10. (C) Only days after this meeting, on October 25, 16 villagers from Gremiskhevi, located east of Akhalgori in undisputed Georgian territory, were detained by Russian forces while they were chopping wood. The Georgians were in direct contact with the Russians regarding the incident, and the Russians indicated that the 16 villagers would be released within a few hours. Nevertheless, on October 26 the Russians informed the Georgians that the 16 had instead been handed over to the South Ossetian de facto authorities. After conducting a survey, EUMM reports that the villagers may have strayed across the boundary by a few meters while cutting wood, but EUMM determined by GPS and a local witness that the arrest itself occurred in undisputed Georgian territory.

¶11. (C) EUMM reports Russian and South Ossetian de facto authorities have so far been reluctant to meet, but have provisionally agreed to meet the Georgians and the EUMM on October 28 at the site of the incident to determine the precise location in reference to the administrative boundary. Haber also plans to follow-up with Moscow regarding the incident. Although the hot line connections between the Georgians and Russians worked during the incident, they did not lead to a resolution of the situation. The Georgian side has reacted to this event without resorting to a state of panic, which suggests to us they are focused on working the problem.

OTHER OSCE EFFORTS IN SOUTH OSSETIA

¶12. (C) On October 21, after having made advance arrangements with de facto South Ossetian authorities and the Georgian government, an OSCE staff member drove a gas expert into Akhalgori to investigate the possibility of providing gas to the region. This is the first time that OSCE staff entered South Ossetia in an OSCE vehicle since shortly after the August 2008 war. The gas expert was able to obtain some information that might help facilitate gas deliveries to Akhalgori.

BASS